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Publisher: Routledge

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Social
History



Volume 40 Number 3
August 2015

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Social History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rshi20>

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Kieran Connell^a & Matthew Hilton^a

^a Queen's University Belfast, University of Birmingham

Published online: 16 Jul 2015.



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To cite this article: Kieran Connell & Matthew Hilton (2015) The working practices of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Social History*, 40:3, 287-311, DOI: [10.1080/03071022.2015.1043191](https://doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2015.1043191)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03071022.2015.1043191>

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Kieran Connell and Matthew Hilton

The working practices of Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies*

ABSTRACT: This article offers a history of the working practices of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Based on extensive interviews with former members and on research into a new archive of the Centre, housed in the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, it argues that cultural studies as practised in the 1970s was always a heterogeneous subject. The CCCS was heavily influenced by the events of 1968 when it tried to develop a new type of radical and collaborative research and teaching agenda. Despite Stuart Hall's efforts to impose a focused link between politics and academic practice, the agenda soon gave way to a series of diverse and fruitful initiatives associated with the 'sub-groups' model of research.

KEYWORDS: cultural studies; New Left; 1968; Stuart Hall; theory; working practices

This article offers an assessment of the working practices of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), founded by Richard Hoggart at the University of Birmingham in 1964. The inner dynamics of academic units do not normally make for compelling reading, but the CCCS – or 'the Centre' as former staff and students frequently refer to it – is somewhat different. First, for historians of the post-war British Left, the CCCS provides a point of focus for how a new generation of leftist thinkers engaged with a society increasingly dominated by affluence, new forms of mass media and the cultures of consumption. Hoggart's own *The Uses of Literacy* was a seminal text, and the innovative analysis he applied in it to his own working-class background became an exemplar for the work he envisaged taking place at the Centre.¹

*This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council under grant AH/K000500/1. We are extremely grateful to the following for their comments on previous versions of this paper: Sally Baggott, John Clarke, Dennis Dworkin, Geoff Eley, Catherine Hall, Herjeet Marway, Chris Moores and Bill Schwarz. We would also like

to thank Helen Fisher at the Cadbury Research Library for her assistance in the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies archive.

¹R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: aspects of working class life, with special reference to publications and entertainments* (London, 1957). See also D. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in*

Second, the importance of the CCCS for the development of cultural studies more generally is not in doubt. Cultural studies has long been a discipline in the making (though, for many, it remains a field of enquiry open to a variety of disciplines) and, as such, has attracted dozens of textbooks, anthologies and analyses of its key intellectual developments. It is something of a norm for 'the Birmingham school' to feature as a founding institution of a global phenomenon, enjoying a chapter – or chapters – dedicated to its own methodological innovations and intellectual contributions.²

Third, and most important for the subject of this article, the CCCS has always had an acute sense of its own history, one which has become integral to the CCCS 'brand'. Although many CCCS figures are understandably reluctant to frame the ongoing prominence of its reputation using this term, and have a particular suspicion for the unified approach suggested by the 'Birmingham school' label, the CCCS was, from the beginning, extraordinarily active in the narration of its own contribution.³ Annual reports, whether compiled by Hoggart or by his successor as director, Stuart Hall, focused on the intellectual work performed over the previous year, thereby locating a fledgling subject within a broader framework of academic debate and dialogue.⁴ Many of the key edited volumes begin with essays or statements that situate each book's particular contribution in relation to institutional changes within the CCCS.⁵ Moreover, former staff and students continue to write their own accounts of their time at the Centre, especially during the period from the student sit-in at the University of Birmingham in 1968 (at which Centre members played a prominent part), to a point some time between Hall's departure in 1979 and the reconstitution of the Centre as a formal academic department during the academic year 1987–8.⁶ It is this post-1968 period that forms the major focus of this article.

Central to the self-narrating and occasional mythologizing of the CCCS are its working practices: the collective projects, the breaking down of barriers between teacher and taught, the general theory seminar, the sub-groups, the embrace of continental

Postwar Britain (Durham, NC, 1997); D. Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia, 2012); F. Inglis, *Richard Hoggart: Virtue and Reward* (Cambridge, 2014).

²See, for example, C. Nelson and D. Gaonkar (eds), *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies* (London, 1996); J. Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture: Theories and Methods* (Edinburgh, 1996); A. McRobbie, *The Uses of Cultural Studies: A Textbook* (London, 2005).

³P. Gilroy, interviewed by K. Connell [hereafter KC], 28 May 2013; S. Hall, 'The emergence of cultural studies and the crisis of the humanities', *October*, 53 (1990), 1; J. Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies: Essays on Cultural Studies in America* (London, 1991), 10.

⁴All CCCS annual reports are accessible online: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/>

[projects/cccs/publications/annual-reports.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/historycultures/departments/history/research/projects/cccs/publications/annual-reports.aspx) (accessed 21 January 2015). For accounts by ex-CCCS members see, for example, Clarke, *New Times and Old Enemies*, *op. cit.*; A. McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture* (London, 1994); and L. Grossberg *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham, NC, 2010).

⁵Perhaps the critical essay in this regard is S. Hall, 'Cultural studies and the Centre: some problematics and problems' in S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe and P. Willis (eds), *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972–79* (London, 1980). But also see, for example, Women's Studies Group, *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination* (London, 1978) and J. Stacey, S. Franklin and C. Lury, *Off-Centre: Feminism and Cultural Studies* (London, 1991).

⁶See CCCS, *Annual Report 1986–88* (Birmingham, 1988), 5.

theory and the engagement with politics beyond the Centre, be it socialism, feminism, anti-racism or the institutional provision and forms of higher education. The products of these working practices were quite extraordinary. As well as the challenges to established forms of pedagogy – especially the nature of postgraduate supervision – the Centre published a number of famous working papers, books and articles that continue to be key reference points, and not just for those who identify themselves as practitioners of cultural studies.

Yet within these narratives, cultural studies is often positioned as the outsider. It is marginalized and misunderstood because of its interdisciplinarity, its radical challenge to traditional academic organization and its opening of new subject areas initially regarded with disdain by more established colleagues, both within and outside the academy. The narrations are not all rose-tinted. Former students acknowledge the all-consuming nature of Centre life, its impact on personal and family matters, and the deep intellectual divisions over politics, theory, subject and methodology, which all too often manifested themselves as ‘slammed doors and angry silences’.⁷ Yet even in accounts that foreground the more negative aspects of the Centre, there remains an element of romanticism that is perhaps emblematic of an over-reliance on oral history and the abundance of personal memoir.⁸

An orthodoxy has emerged about the fate of cultural studies at Birmingham. Most agree that the Centre was the victim of a number of political, academic and institutional attacks and misunderstandings. First, other, more well-established disciplines failed to appreciate the contributions of cultural studies. These debates ranged from internal disputes over departmental locations and faculty siting at the University of Birmingham, to splenetic interventions by academics elsewhere (and even by former CCCS members, especially Hoggart) and on to more popular diatribes about “‘mickey mouse” studies’.⁹ Second, the University of Birmingham itself has long been regarded as the main enemy of one of its most famous intellectual institutions, from the lack of financial support given to it, particularly after the events of 1968 when it began to thrive in other ways, all the way through to its final closure as a department in 2002. Third, enemies on the political Left – ‘Old’ and ‘New’ – disliked the turn to theory taken by the Centre in the 1970s, especially the seeming embrace of Althusserian structuralism. This culminated in the notorious showdown between the combative historian, E. P. Thompson, the articulate Hall and the much less confrontational Richard Johnson at the History Workshop in 1979.¹⁰ Finally, the eventual fate of the Centre – or the cultural studies project – is seen as the consequence of a more general fragmentation of the Left, associated with the rise of identity politics. In particular, the challenges thrown to the supposed unity of the cultural studies project by the politics of feminism and race led to major divisions and were associated with the departure of Hall to the Open University in 1979. In some ways, then, the achievements

⁷S. Hall, ‘Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies’ in D. Morley and K. Chen, *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London, 1996), 263.

⁸See L. Grossberg, ‘The formations of cultural studies: an American in Birmingham’ in V. Blundell, J. Shepherd and I. Taylor (eds),

Relocating Cultural Studies: Developments in Theory and Research (London, 1993), 23.

⁹R. Hoggart, *The Way We Live Now* (London, 1996).

¹⁰Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, op. cit., 245; R. Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London, 1981).

and debates within cultural studies prefigure many of the advances and issues associated with the 'cultural turn' more generally.

Our aim in this article is not to dispute these very real pressures placed on the work of the Centre. In particular, the university's treatment of the Centre was often farcical, from its refusal to offer Hoggart financial support or subsequently Hall a chair to its various re-organizations of the CCCS and the university's ultimate decision to close the Centre down. These issues have been dealt with elsewhere.¹¹ What we want to reflect on here is the extent to which these external pressures were actually present within the working practices of the Centre, particularly after Hall took over from Hoggart, and were therefore integral to how cultural studies developed in Birmingham. Such a detailed focus on the formative years of the Centre, particularly during and immediately after the protests of 1968, is now possible thanks to the archive of the CCCS currently under construction. Located at the Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham, and housed in the basement of the Muirhead Tower (in which the Centre eventually settled on the eighth floor), the archives contain the collected papers of numerous former staff and students, supplemented by dozens of interviews now available online (together with the annual reports and the famous 'stencilled papers').¹² Importantly, interviews have been undertaken not only with alumni who have gone on to have careers within the academy and have often already reflected on the importance of spending their formative intellectual years at the Centre, but an effort has also been made to include those who left academia and as a result may have different perspectives on the significance of cultural studies at Birmingham.¹³

What the archive allows us to do is contextualize the prevailing oral histories and memoirs of the Centre and foreground the practical aspects of the development of cultural studies at Birmingham. It allows us to show how the everyday aspects of doing cultural studies were integral to the better known story of the intellectual development of the subject. This article thus builds on a burgeoning interest in the development of academic disciplines, not least that of anthropology. But it draws inspiration especially from Mike Savage's account of the development of the social sciences in Britain. He tracks the rise of the social science 'apparatus' such that it became an increasingly routinized part of British life in the late twentieth century. He takes a broad-ranging definition of the social sciences to include examinations of identities and solidarities. The interpretation can be extended further such that we might apply it to examinations of culture as studied by CCCS and others who moved the analysis beyond texts and towards practice. Savage looks not so much to the outcomes of social science research, but to its methods – researching what he refers to as the research 'boiler room' or what might be called the laboratory, though for the CCCS this was a laboratory characterized very

¹¹See A. Gray, 'Cultural studies at Birmingham: the impossibility of critical pedagogy?', *Cultural Studies*, 17, 6 (2003), 767–82; F. Webster, 'Cultural studies and sociology at, and after, the closure of the Birmingham school', *Cultural Studies*, 18, 6 (2004), 847–62; and D. Marsh, 'Sociology and

cultural studies at Birmingham and beyond', *Cultural Studies*, 19, 3 (2005), 388–93.

¹²See www.birmingham.ac.uk/cccs (accessed 21 January 2015).

¹³See, for example, the interviews conducted with Neil Grant, Errol Lawrence, Patricia McCabe, Merlyn Moos and Roger Shannon.

heavily by a post-1968 leftist experimentalism.¹⁴ As such, what this detailed empirical uncovering of academic practice does is explore the often troubled development of New Left thinking in Britain. For Stuart Hall in particular the CCCS was always a part of his journey on the Left. While the Centre was not envisaged crudely as a form of political entryism into the academy, it was nevertheless strongly associated with New Left debates and thinking. The history of the Centre in the post-1968 conjuncture, then, tells an important story that links the creation of the *New Left Review* (of which Hall was the first editor) to the emergence of identity politics in 1970s and 1980s Britain.

This article therefore unpicks some of the established narratives about the Centre. It seeks to further ‘decentre’ it, as others have put it when pointing to the different traditions that gave rise to the broader project of cultural studies around the world.¹⁵ The argument put forward here, however, is that an intellectual heterogeneity was written into the heart of the Centre’s working practices almost from the very beginning, belying the apparent unity of an approach embraced by a singular ‘Centre’. Of course, a commitment to a collective project does not assume a concomitant intellectual unity, but Hall in particular gave it a political purpose and direction of travel. As will be seen, the ‘sub-group’ approach was clearly crucial to the intellectual vitality of Centre work during the 1970s, and led to some of the most well-known CCCS publications. But as the archive now shows, the very creation of the sub-groups was an expedient that was born out of the recognition, as early as 1970, that the overall direction of Centre research could never be as focused as either Hoggart or Hall had envisaged (if for politically different yet academically similar reasons). This is not to argue that the Centre was bound to fail (at least in its guise as an autonomous research and postgraduate centre), but it is to point out that there was never really a moment in the history of cultural studies at Birmingham when diversity and sometimes division were not chief characteristics.

This is a further reminder of a key aspect of cultural studies that Hall reiterated throughout his career: that cultural studies was never a unified subject, that it was never a discipline in its own right, and it was properly a field of enquiry that could embrace many different approaches and frameworks. The ‘thief in the night’, that Hall invoked so controversially to explain the impact of feminism at the Centre, ought not to be regarded as the unexpected and scatological guest.¹⁶ Arguably, several other characters with their own interests and agendas had been invited to a seat at the table when the cultural studies party threw its doors wide open in 1968. To put it another way, cultural studies did not suffer from the consequences of the fragmentation of the Left; its working practices fruitfully embodied these tensions right from the start.

¹⁴See M. Savage, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method* (Oxford, 2010).

¹⁵See H. K. Wright, ‘Dare we de-centre Birmingham? Troubling the “origin” and trajectories of cultural studies’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 1, 1 (1998), 33–56; and Blundell, Shepherd and Taylor (eds), *Relocating Cultural Studies*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶See Hall, ‘Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies’, *op. cit.* Hall’s paper was originally given at a conference on cultural studies at the University of Illinois in 1990 and is reprinted in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies* (New York and London, 1992), 277–86.

THE LEGACIES OF 1968

One remarkable feature of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies is the sheer amount of energy devoted to capturing its history, work and influence. The often celebratory and too often uncritical accounts continue to this day. In 2013 alone, Laurie Taylor devoted two episodes of his Radio 4 programme to reflecting on 'Bingo, Barbie and Barthes: fifty years of cultural studies'.¹⁷ A thirty-fifth anniversary edition of the seminal CCCS publication *Policing the Crisis* was published.¹⁸ Former CCCS student Roy [Mahasiddhi] Peters undertook a project to photograph around thirty staff and students associated with the Centre. And at the end of the year, the journal *Cultural Studies*, edited by CCCS alumnus Lawrence Grossberg, devoted an entire issue to a series of interviews with CCCS members who had been active at various times from 1964 all the way through to 2002.¹⁹ All of these were but the latest initiatives in an ongoing series of publications in which CCCS staff and students have demonstrated an acute sense of their own history and significance.

The authors of this article do not stand apart from the myth-making we seek to explore. Indeed, we know all too well the strength of the allure of the CCCS. Hilton was first employed in the history department at Birmingham in 1997 and was delighted to become an 'Associate Member' of the then department of cultural studies and sociology in 2001, just twelve months before its closure in 2002. Connell undertook a Ph.D. in history on 'Black Handsworth in the 1980s', very much adopting an approach inspired by some of the more famous CCCS publications.²⁰ Moreover, he was guided informally by the late Michael Green, a then-retired former CCCS staff member who had taught and remained friends with his parents who had met while studying together on the M.A. in cultural studies in the early 1980s. When in 2011 the University of Birmingham sought to recognize the achievements of former individuals connected to the university with a series of blue plaques around the main campus, the authors pushed hard to ensure that one such plaque would uniquely celebrate the collective work of the CCCS rather than any one academic such as Hoggart or Hall.²¹ They subsequently secured funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to consolidate other efforts to commemorate the Centre, and they have overseen the creation of the archive upon which this article is based.²²

It is through all these efforts that the recognition of the CCCS has developed and been consolidated. Great intellectual capital is now attributed to those who received their

¹⁷The programmes were first broadcast on 7 and 14 October 2013 and are accessible at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03fot4y> (accessed 4 April 2014).

¹⁸S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (London, 2013).

¹⁹See *Cultural Studies*, 27, 5 (2013).

²⁰See K. Connell, 'A Micro-History of Black Handsworth: Towards a Social History of Race in Britain' (Ph.D. thesis, Department of Modern History, University of Birmingham, 2012).

²¹For further information see: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/culture/collections/blueplaque.aspx> (accessed 4 April 2014).

²²Several attempts had been made to create an archive of the CCCS. This latest venture was supported by Michael Green and then Stuart Hall, who in turn convinced others interested in the project to lend their support. This enabled funding to be secured from the AHRC (AH/K000500/1). The project ran until February 2015.

postgraduate training at the Centre alongside some of the leading figures of the CCCS (especially 'Stuart' who, unlike the others, is more often than not referred to by his first name). They have frequently been asked to reminisce publicly about their time spent at Birmingham. For Chris Rojek, writing in his 2006 introduction to Hall's work, the prevalence of these personalized narratives has had negative consequences for those with a more detached interest in the CCCS, including the implicit suggestion 'that if you weren't there ... you can't know what it was like'.²³ Many careers have undoubtedly benefited from an association with the CCCS. But for those who have moved on to different fields of study, their connection to the Centre has perhaps been more ambiguous. John Clarke, for example, remembers later in his career being at a conference on an entirely different subject to his earlier CCCS work. He was approached with a question from a delegate: 'Didn't you used to be *the* John Clarke?'²⁴

The CCCS opened its doors in autumn 1964, a year after Hoggart delivered his inaugural lecture at Birmingham in which he set out the rationale for a programme that he provisionally called 'Literature and Contemporary Cultural Studies'.²⁵ Penguin Books were the main financial backers of the project as a result of the relationship Hoggart had developed with its founder, Sir Allen Lane, following the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* obscenity trial.²⁶ Penguin's annual grant of £2400 largely covered the appointment of Stuart Hall as the Centre's Research Fellow – the other staff members at this time were Hoggart, Michael Green, who divided his time between the CCCS and the English department, and a secretary.²⁷ There were just six full-time students in the Centre's first year, and the key events were a weekly 'working' seminar and a general seminar open to non-CCCS members, as well as fortnightly supervision meetings.²⁸ By 1973 there were thirty-nine students attached to the CCCS, the university had become a financial supporter and the Centre had begun to organize itself around its now famous satellite 'sub-group' model of research.²⁹ By the time the M.A. in cultural studies was offered for the first time in 1975–6, there were more than fifty students attached to the CCCS.³⁰ Staff numbers, however, did not increase. Paul Willis worked as a funded postdoctoral researcher after his Ph.D., but Hall and Green were only joined by Richard Johnson in 1974. Students, as much for practical as well as political or intellectual reasons, were therefore the lifeblood of the Centre, though their heightened influence was also the

²³C. Rojek, *Stuart Hall* (Cambridge, 2003), x. For a response to Rojek see B. Schwarz, 'Stuart Hall', *Cultural Studies*, 19, 2 (2006), 176–202.

²⁴J. Clarke, interviewed by KC, 11 October 2013.

²⁵R. Hoggart, 'Schools of English and contemporary society', inaugural lecture at the University of Birmingham, 1963, in A. Gray, J. Campbell, M. Erickson, S. Hanson and H. Wood (eds), *CCCS Selected Working Papers*, vol. 1 (London, 2001), 21.

²⁶Between 1964 and 1975 the Centre received a grant of £2400 from Penguin. See S. Hall, 'The reality principle', *October* (1970), 1. Cadbury Research Library, Special

Collections, University of Birmingham [subsequently CRL], Stuart Laing Papers [subsequently SL], USS98; R. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life: Life and Times 1959–1991* (Oxford, 1993), 77. A full cataloguing of the Stuart Laing Papers is currently taking place.

²⁷Smaller grants also came from the *Observer* Trust and Chatto & Windus. See CCCS, *Annual Report 1965* (October 1965), 1.

²⁸*ibid.*, 1.

²⁹CCCS, *Annual Report 1972–74* (January 1974), 5.

³⁰CCCS, *Annual Report 1974–76* (January 1976), 27–8.

product of Hoggart and Hall's background in adult education where more democratic learning processes had been encouraged.³¹

Undoubtedly, the Centre's formation arose out of a more general turn to culture among primarily New Left thinkers. Hoggart and Hall participated in an intellectual journey alongside the likes of E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams and which would flourish in the 1970s with the launch of *History Workshop Journal* and *Social History*. Yet key facets of the CCCS mythology are the events and legacies of 1968 as a political moment. Indeed, just as 1968 creates a badge of authenticity for a certain generation of leftist thinkers and activists more generally, so too does participation in the Centre's interventions in the student sit-in at the University of Birmingham mark a special status for these Centre members.³²

The protests were a formative moment for cultural studies, and not just at the Centre. At Birmingham, though, the experience of the atmosphere of political experimentation fed directly into the working practices of the academic unit. As Hall took over the effective directorship from Hoggart late the following year, there was actually much stronger continuity in the intellectual objectives of the Centre than is usually recognized.³³ Classic Centre texts like the jointly authored *Policing the Crisis* (1978), Dorothy Hobson's *Crossroads* (1982) and Angela McRobbie's *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (1991) examined – albeit with contrasting theoretical frameworks – the media, soap opera and girls' magazines, each of which were central themes within Hoggart's early conception of what cultural studies would look like.³⁴ But what was different was the manner in which the research was to be carried out. While former members like to refer to the post-1968 moment as one of 'shifting forms', something that was 'made up as you went along', there was in fact a deliberate attempt to insert into the academic agenda of the Centre a leftist politics very much associated with late 1960s experimentalism.³⁵

The existence of the archive only confirms the importance of 1968 to the development of the Centre. From the start, CCCS staff and students were heavily involved in the sit-in. In May of that year, the issue of the in-house student magazine, *Mermaid*, was edited by Hall. It featured a collection of essays on the student experience at Birmingham – on

³¹Tom Steele, *The Emergence of Cultural Studies, 1945–1965: Cultural Politics, Adult Education and the English Question* (London, 1997).

³²For an exploration of the significance of 1968 in the identities of a generation of leftist activists see C. Hughes, 'Negotiating ungovernable spaces between the personal and the political: oral history and the left in post-war Britain', *Memory Studies*, 6, 1 (January 2013), 70–90.

³³There is some inconsistency in the archive regarding the exact date of Hoggart's initial departure for UNESCO. In some accounts this date is given as 1968, while in his autobiography Hoggart gives the date as January 1970. It is likely that this was the date

of his formal secondment as Assistant Director-General at UNESCO, though he had informally left Birmingham some months earlier. The Centre's *Annual Report 1969–71* states that the academic year 1971–2 was Hoggart's final year of secondment at UNESCO. Hoggart formally resigned from the University of Birmingham in 1973. See R. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life*, *op. cit.*, 98; CCCS, *Annual Report 1969–71* (December 1971), 7; CCCS, *Annual Report 1972–74* (January 1974), 1.

³⁴Hoggart, 'Schools of English and contemporary society', *op. cit.*, 21.

³⁵Clarke, *New Times*, *op. cit.*, 10; McRobbie, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, *op. cit.*, 48.

student accommodation, on the experience of learning in higher education and on the nature of the university's 'authority structures' and 'how [these] could be changed'.³⁶ Other contributors included Michael Green, Trevor Blackwell and Trevor Millum – each of whom were members of the CCCS – and Catherine Hall, who was enrolled as a student in the history department and had recently married Stuart. Within six months of the publication of this issue, in late November 1968, students staged a sit-in at the University of Birmingham.

The sit-in had its roots in an earlier students' Guild publication calling for a greater say in the running of the university.³⁷ For Hall, writing in *Mermaid*, it was the university's unwillingness to engage in such dialogue that was the 'most worrying problem of all'.³⁸ According to the university's account of the sit-in, relations between university management and the Guild became fraught following the growing influence of the 'Ad Hoc group for University Reform', a group of students whose 'extremist attitudes' the university saw as being 'derived from a knowledge of earlier student revolts in some French, German and American universities'.³⁹ In late October tensions heightened over the university's policies towards the admission of Czech students following the Prague Spring, student use of the refectory and the unwillingness of management to allow student representation on all university committees.⁴⁰ A stand-off continued until 28 November when the sit-in began, locking Robert Hunter, the university's newly appointed Vice-Chancellor, along with his administrative staff, out of their offices for a week.

The CCCS was not explicitly named in the university's account of the protests – the focus was instead on Dick Atkinson, a temporary lecturer in sociology who had been active in earlier protests while a postgraduate at the London School of Economics.⁴¹ Yet the CCCS did play an active role. Lawrence Grossberg, who began as a postgraduate student at the CCCS in 1968, and Chas Critcher, who joined the following year, having been an undergraduate in English, were both named by the university as part of the student negotiating committee during the protests.⁴² Hall 'wasn't organizing the sit-in' but his 'sympathies were on the side of students who were demanding change'.⁴³ Indeed, Paul Willis, who was active in the protests and had just enrolled as a Ph.D. student at the CCCS, remembered Hall addressing the sit-in. For Willis, Hall came across 'not [as] a

³⁶'The concept of a university' in *Mermaid* magazine (Birmingham, 1968), 7 and also S. Hall, 'Blowing in the wind', 28, in CRL, Records of the Guild of Students [subsequently Guild], UB/GUILD/F/3/43.

³⁷Guild of Students, 'The student role: memorandum on the student contribution presented by the Guild of Students' (January 1968), CRL, Guild, UB/GUILD/E/7/3; E. Ives, D. Drummond and L. Schwarz, *The First Civic University: Birmingham 1880–1980* (Birmingham, 2000), 353.

³⁸Hall, 'Blowing in the wind', *op. cit.*, 28–30.

³⁹University of Birmingham, 'The students' role in 1968: an account by the Registrar of the

one week demonstration by students and the events which led up to it', CRL, Guild, UB/GUILD/A/8.

⁴⁰*ibid.*, 4; Ives, Drummond and Schwarz, *The First Civic University*, *op. cit.*, 358.

⁴¹University of Birmingham, 'The students' role', *op. cit.*, 3. For an overview of the student protest movement at the London School of Economics, see Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism*, *op. cit.*, 130–1.

⁴²University of Birmingham, 'The students' role', *op. cit.*, 16.

⁴³S. Hall, interviewed by KC, 22 August 2013.

professorial figure...but a revolutionary and radical figure speaking to masses of students'.⁴⁴ Grossberg has subsequently written of the influence the political radicalism of the 1960s had on the development of the cultural studies project, and in the weeks after the Birmingham protests described them as 'part of a worldwide challenge to the existing power structure'.⁴⁵ Willis argued that the Centre's involvement in the sit-in 'transformed how we would approach intellectual work'.⁴⁶ Indeed, it shifted the nature of the Centre's working practices in a number of important ways.

First, it made Hoggart's position as director and the external face of the CCCS difficult to maintain. According to his autobiography, Hoggart was broadly supportive of the protests and took part in the associated 'teach in'.⁴⁷ Both he and Hall, the latter recalled, were 'treading a fine line', but whereas Hall was attached only to the Centre, Hoggart also had to maintain the externally visible position of Professor of English that included seats on the Faculty Board and the University Senate.⁴⁸ Willis felt Hoggart was 'walking on glass' in late 1968, while others later accepted Hoggart occupied an uncomfortable middle ground.⁴⁹ According to Ros Brunt, such a mediatory position meant he 'met with hostility from both sides', including an instance when he was booed by a member of the CCCS as he entered a room.⁵⁰ Hoggart had 'a very rough time' and, in a little over a year, had left the CCCS to take up a job at UNESCO.⁵¹

Second, and most importantly, the Centre's support of the student protests led to a concerted attempt to initiate a democratization of its working practices. Decisions relating to the day-to-day management of the Centre, its intellectual scope and its future direction were opened up to the students. It is worth noting that this was partly in response to practical considerations and, in particular, the remarkably low staff numbers in the Centre's formative years. More than this, however, what Hall termed the 'rupture' of staff-student relations arose out of a political and intellectual commitment to the ethos of 1968: 'every Centre meeting' at this time was an enquiry into 'the politics of cultural studies' and 'how we should organize our work so it makes sense' in the context of the student protests.⁵² Writing in an internal CCCS document in 1971, Hall described this process as an attempt to 'challenge and modify the prevailing modes of knowledge and authority', to initiate a 'utopian enclave' that could 'transcend the limits of what appears possible and natural within the existing limits of our situation'.⁵³

⁴⁴P. Willis, interviewed by KC, 19 August 2013.

⁴⁵See Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, *op. cit.*, 18; L. Grossberg, 'What did it mean?', *Birmingham Red Base*, 3 (1968), 3-4, CRL, University Archives, UA9/3.

⁴⁶Interview with Willis.

⁴⁷Hoggart, *An Imagined Life*, *op. cit.*, 92.

⁴⁸Interview with Hall. On Hoggart's role see M. Green, 'Richard Hoggart in a working context: Birmingham English in the sixties' in M. Bailey and M. Eagleton (eds), *Richard Hoggart: Culture and Critique* (Nottingham, 2011), 30-5.

⁴⁹Interview with Willis; M. Green, 'Richard Hoggart', *op. cit.*, 33.

⁵⁰R. Brunt in C. Pawling and R. Brunt, 'Christopher Pawling and Rosalind Brunt interview - 6 June 2011', *Cultural Studies*, 27, 5 (2013), 701.

⁵¹Interview with Hall; S. Hall, R. Johnson and M. Green, 'On contradictions' (January 1979), 2. CRL, R. O'Rourke papers, USS86/1/2.

⁵²Interview with Hall.

⁵³S. Hall, 'The missed moment' (Summer 1971), 8. R. Hoggart papers, University of Sheffield, MS 247/4/6/15.

One of Hall's first decisions as acting CCCS director was to obtain funds to purchase a second reprographic 'Gestetner' machine to be used by the students. This enabled them to mass-produce and distribute without Hall's permission written material ranging from position papers and memos regarding the administration and intellectual practice of the Centre to the political pamphlets and magazines of Centre members.⁵⁴ Having assumed the position of effective director in 1969, Hall made efforts to relinquish his authority as leader. Decisions were made at a weekly Centre General Meeting at which everything 'from the politics of intellectual work to how to manage paper supply' was discussed.⁵⁵ Writing in his autobiography, Hoggart remembered how shortly before his departure to UNESCO an unnamed student demanded a commitment from Hoggart that only students with a similar politics be admitted into the Centre. 'We have no time', Hoggart quotes the student as saying, 'for the Matthew Arnoldian liberal humanist line of Hoggart!'⁵⁶ Brunt subsequently identified herself as the student in question and saw it as 'indicative of some democratic inklings emerging in the Centre'.⁵⁷ A student Admissions Advisory Group was established to advise on admissions policy and students would sit on interview panels for prospective students.⁵⁸ The Centre would later set up its own unofficial hardship fund made up of a 'voluntary levy of 2.5 per cent' taken from all Centre members who earned a salary in order to 'assist people who have to pay their own fees ... as well as those who find it difficult to pay the rent'.⁵⁹ As Hall put it in 1970, the aim was 'nothing less than the creation, within ... the existing system, of a *collective* – an intellectual *foco*: a sort of advanced base'.⁶⁰

In 1966, the Centre did begin work on what was called its 'first properly collective project', an investigation into representations of women in magazines.⁶¹ Once Hall took over, however, the emphasis on collective work increased with the overt aim to distinguish 'a Cultural Studies terrain independently from its English Studies root'.⁶² One of the first studies with this aim was an investigation of the experiences of the student sitting in Birmingham.⁶³ This was followed by an examination of 'the western' (1969–70) and an attempt at writing a *Reader in Cultural Studies* which, after 'long discussion', was followed by the launch of the CCCS journal, *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*.⁶⁴ Between 1970 and 1972 a General Theory Seminar was introduced with a focus on the structuralism of Barthes, Lévi-Strauss and Saussure in order to link with the western project.⁶⁵ This became the key event of the week, followed by the Working Seminar on Monday afternoons and then the Graduate Seminar featuring visiting speakers on

⁵⁴See, for example, *Birmingham Free Press* and later *Bosses Enemy*. CRL, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies papers [subsequently CCCS], miscellaneous publications, UB/CCCS/A/6.

⁵⁵J. Clarke in 'John Clarke interview – 31 May 2011', *Cultural Studies*, 27, 5 (2013), 3.

⁵⁶Hoggart, *An Imagined Life*, *op. cit.*, 98.

⁵⁷R. Brunt, interviewed by KC with C. Pawling and T. Millum, 15 August 2013.

⁵⁸Hall, Johnson and Green, *op. cit.*, 2.

⁵⁹CCCS Memo, 'Project fund' (May 1978). CRL, T. Jefferson papers, USS79/3/5.

⁶⁰Hall, 'The missed moment', *op. cit.*, 9.

⁶¹See Hall, Johnson and Green, *op. cit.*, 2. This early project was a reading of 'Cure for marriage', a short story in a women's magazine.

⁶²*ibid.*

⁶³This was eventually published as P. Willis, 'What is news – a case study', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 1 (1971), 9–36.

⁶⁴CCCS, *Annual Report 1968–69* (October 1969), 19; Hall, Johnson and Green, *op. cit.*, 3.

⁶⁵CCCS, *Annual Report 1969–71*, 10.

Tuesday afternoons. In autumn 1971 the tight General Theory Seminar was abandoned – partly because of the failure of both the western and the *Reader in Cultural Studies* projects – and replaced by a “looser” notion of collective work’, informed by the famous ‘sub-group’ model.⁶⁶ The initial groups were ‘Literature and Society’ and ‘Media Studies’, soon followed by ‘Sub-cultures’.⁶⁷

Once the M.A. had been launched in October 1975, new students were required to attend the two core courses over the first two terms, run on Monday afternoons. The MA was, however, open to all Centre members and acted as a continuum of the General Theory Seminar. Hall ran ten sessions on cultural theory in the autumn term, followed by a similar block by Richard Johnson on modern British history from 1880 to 1935. Students chose their broad dissertation areas and, instead of taking an optional unit as they would today, they attached themselves to one or more sub-groups, meeting at different times during the week and devoted to such topics as ‘Art and Politics’, ‘Cultural History’, ‘Media’, ‘Sub-cultures’, ‘Women’s Studies’ and ‘Work’ as well as an additional Marx Reading Group. The idea was that rather than working as an isolated student, meeting one’s tutor with varying degrees of regularity, the students would immerse themselves in a collective research enterprise which would serve as a ‘method of support to thesis work’.⁶⁸ Reports of the sub-groups would then be fed through at presentations in the summer term, often becoming one of the ‘stencilled occasional papers’ or, if developed further, a paper in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. In addition, Centre members – staff, students, visiting lecturers and occasional students from other departments and institutions – might contribute to externally funded projects such as ‘The transition from school to work’ (Social Science Research Council), ‘Race in the provincial press’ (UNESCO), or other CCCS projects such as that on ‘Mugging’, resourced through the contributions of staff, students and other members.

The sub-group model of collaborative working is perhaps the best-known feature of the CCCS’s working practices, and it was something that helped enable Centre members to maintain strong, often-politicized links to the world outside the academy. This was not only in keeping with the ethos of 1968; it also referenced an ambivalence about academic work that many CCCS students shared with Hall, Thompson and other members of the New Left whose route into the academy began with adult education. As Critcher put it, ‘Making an intellectual difference wasn’t enough.’⁶⁹ *Policing the Crisis*, for example, was the direct product of the community work Critcher had helped organize in the Handsworth district of Birmingham. Members of the Women’s Studies Group that would go on collectively to produce *Women Take Issue* were also involved in various feminist initiatives, including a women’s writing group called ‘Women and Words’ and the setting up of a refuge for victims of domestic abuse in a disused Birmingham hospital.⁷⁰ The collective approach and outputs that the events of 1968 helped to initiate

⁶⁶Hall, Johnson and Green, *op. cit.*, 3.

⁶⁷CCCS, *Annual Report 1972–74*, 8–12.

⁶⁸CCCS, *Annual Report 1975–76* (January 1976), 13.

⁶⁹C. Critcher, interviewed by KC, 4 June 2013.

⁷⁰‘Women and Words’ was organized by Myra Connell and Rebecca O’Rourke, both of whom were active within the Women’s Studies and English sub-groups. The women’s refuge was set up as a squat at a disused hospital on Priory Road in the Edgbaston district of Birmingham. See R. O’Rourke, interviewed

within the Centre may have contributed to its notoriously poor record on thesis completion. Yet for many, it was as stimulating and inspiring as it was time-consuming.

The papers and collections that would eventually give the CCCS its international reputation were the products of often fraught collaborations. Draft papers were produced, presented, torn apart, rewritten and altered again and again. Collaborative work of this nature required energy, generosity and a willingness to accept that the collective output was more important than the individual input. In the preface to the thirty-fifth anniversary edition of *Policing the Crisis*, for instance, Stuart Hall and his fellow authors reflected that ‘the prolonged, difficult process of collective research’ served as the ‘intellectual “laboratory” out of which the ideas, theories and arguments that animate the text were produced’.⁷¹ Maureen McNeil, who was appointed to the CCCS following Hall’s departure to the Open University in 1979, remembers that there was a ‘fantastic creativity’ to writing with postgraduate students that continued into the 1980s.⁷² For Rebecca O’Rourke, an M.A. and then Ph.D. student at the Centre in the 1970s, collective work provided ‘the intensity, the capacity ... and ... the ability to produce something greater and more powerful than any one of you individually could have produced’.⁷³

The reasons for the eventual demise of some of these key features of CCCS experimentalism have been attributed to a number of threats. First, there were the persistently hostile attitudes of other academics and managers at Birmingham, something evidenced by the early refusal of the department of English to provide financial assistance to the Centre.⁷⁴ In its first years the CCCS was based on the edge of campus in a series of Quonset huts originally intended as temporary pre-war structures, which Hall saw as a daily reminder of the Centre’s ‘marginal status in the field’.⁷⁵ The attitude of the department of sociology is indicative of the suspicion with which figures in the established disciplines regarded the Centre. In 1967, Hoggart and Hall gave a paper at the department of sociology, which was received with some hostility. Hoggart wrote to the head of department, Charles Madge (also the co-founder of Mass Observation) and stated: ‘To put it very bluntly: as the discussion progressed I felt less that we’d been asked to come and talk about the Centre and its possible relationships with social scientists than that we’d been put up to be grilled or even put on trial.’⁷⁶ During the re-organization of the Centre in the mid-1980s, which eventually resulted in its reconstitution as a department and its subsequent merger with sociology, the pressure from university management was such that one option seriously being considered by CCCS staff was the relocation of the Centre from Birmingham to Sussex.⁷⁷

Second, mirroring broader developments across the Left more generally, the Centre also became the stage on which the challenge of identity politics was played out. These

by KC, 24 July 2013, and P. McCabe, interviewed by KC, 23 May 2013.

⁷¹Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis*, *op. cit.*, x.

⁷²M. McNeil, interviewed by KC, 19 July 2013.

⁷³Interview with O’Rourke.

⁷⁴R. Hoggart, *An Imagined Life*, *op. cit.*, 77.

⁷⁵Hall, ‘Emergence of cultural studies’, *op. cit.*, 13.

⁷⁶R. Hoggart, correspondence with C. Madge (10 May 1967). Richard Hoggart papers, University of Sheffield, MS247/4/6/19.

⁷⁷Letter from S. Hall to M. Green (18 May 1987); letter from M. Green to R. Johnson (18 June 1987). CRL, Richard Johnson papers [subsequently RJ], US119/1/4.

were the 'great interruptions' of race and gender that Hall later referred to when speaking of his time as director.⁷⁸ The story concerning gender is usually told through the experiences of the Women's Studies sub-group, which was established in October 1974 and produced *Women Take Issue* four years later. In 1976 the group had demanded, during their presentation to the rest of the Centre at the end of the year, that membership of the group be explicitly restricted to women only.⁷⁹ Charlotte Brunsdon, a member of the group, characterizes this as the key 'bridgehead' into the CCCS of 'the "new" identities and identity politics', with the existing sub-groups fulfilling the role of 'the old boys' and 'occupying a terrain conceptualized mainly in terms of social class'.⁸⁰ This is illustrated, perhaps inadvertently, by an internal CCCS document, co-authored by Hall, Johnson and Green, which suggested that this period within the Centre could be seen as a conflict between 'being working class and male ... as opposed to being female, middle class and feminist'.⁸¹ The CCCS collectively prioritized a commitment to 'Marxist-Feminism' in 1977 yet tensions persisted and were exacerbated by similar emerging issues about race.⁸² Hall later reflected that his invocation of the 'thieves in the night' who 'crapped on the table of cultural studies' had been meant as an attempt to 'speak in favour' of interruptions like feminism in cultural studies.⁸³ But he saw his cruder remark as a 'terrible trip of the tongue – as Freud said [it] betrayed more than it said'.⁸⁴ The remark indicated to Hall that 'you are finding this very difficult ... you've always been in favour of women's rights ... but when it comes to authority and power, you are not as transformed as you think you are'.⁸⁵

Third, as the Centre turned to continental theory to co-ordinate its collaborative explorations of culture, it increasingly found itself in conflict with members of the 'first' New Left, especially the cultural Marxist historian, E. P. Thompson. Alongside Raymond Williams and Hoggart himself, Thompson was a key influence on the Centre project but was becoming increasingly hostile towards its embrace of continental theory and Althusserian structuralism. Richard Johnson described himself as a 'disciple' of Thompson's, having worked closely with his wife Dorothy when based in Birmingham's history department.⁸⁶ In 1978 he began a correspondence with Thompson that was to become a precursor to a series of interventions in the *History Workshop Journal* and to Thompson's public and dramatic falling out with the CCCS at the 1979 History Workshop conference at Ruskin College, Oxford.⁸⁷ Johnson was working on an essay that was an attempt, he wrote to Thompson, to 'reconcile what I've learnt from yourself' with 'what I have learnt ... since coming to the Centre'.⁸⁸ Johnson wanted to 'persuade

⁷⁸S. Hall, 'The formation of a diasporic intellectual' in Morley and Chen, *op. cit.*, 486–505.

⁷⁹C. Brunsdon, 'A thief in the night – stories of feminism in the 1970s at CCCS' in Morley and Chen, *op. cit.*, 282.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 280.

⁸¹Hall, Johnson and Green, *op. cit.*, 5.

⁸²See CCCS, 'Priorities for the year' (October 1977). CRL, RJ, USS119/1/1.

⁸³Hall, 'Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies', *op. cit.*, 282.

⁸⁴Interview with Hall.

⁸⁵Interview with Hall.

⁸⁶R. Johnson, interviewed by KC, 19 June 2013.

⁸⁷R. Johnson, 'Edward Johnson, Eugene Genovese, and socialist-humanist history', *History Workshop Journal*, 6 (1978), 79–100. See also the responses and wider debate about history and theory in volumes 7–10 of the same journal.

⁸⁸R. Johnson, letter to E. P. Thompson (20 April 1978). CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1.

Edward to shift his position'.⁸⁹ Yet in his responses Thompson gave little or no ground. He accused the Centre of being 'prickly' and hostile to outsiders, and situated what he saw as his own tradition of 'historical materialism' against the 'tradition of idealism to which Althusser firmly belongs, and into whose toils I consider that the Centre – and yourself – have been sucked'.⁹⁰ Thompson wrote that Johnson should 'expect to find the heavy paw of my polemic coming down on your shoulder'.⁹¹ This came at Ruskin in December 1979, an event convened to discuss the publication of Thompson's *The Poverty of Theory*. Speaking on a panel with Johnson and Stuart Hall in front of an audience of more than 700 people (having only decided to speak the night before), Thompson ruthlessly attacked the work of Philip Corrigan and, by extension, that of the CCCS generally, for its 'theoretical terrorism' in which, he said, theory is treated as 'a seminar game in which one can say any damn thing one likes'.⁹² Raphael Samuel described the event as 'gladiatorial combat' and the *New Society* magazine called his performance a 'demolition job' that 'caused evident personal pain and discomfort to many of those present'.⁹³ If Hall saw his 1990 comments about feminism as symbolizing the moment his association with the CCCS fundamentally ruptured, for Dennis Dworkin, Ruskin 1979 was the signal that a more general 'phase in historical and cultural theory was coming to an end'.⁹⁴

All three of these issues and threats suggest a departure of Centre practices from some earlier, more unified goal. However, in what follows it becomes clear that cultural studies was always a heterogeneous practice and that many of the debates the Centre engaged with in the later 1970s were core concerns with the era of collaboration ushered in by Hall. The embrace of a democratic ethos in the CCCS after 1968 marked a new post-Hoggart era, but the speed with which the Centre then moved from a 'tight' to a 'loose' collective was remarkable. Even before the sub-groups had been established, themselves an indicator of the difficulties of creating a unified 'cultural studies', detailed discussions within the Centre prefigured many of the more public debates of the later 1970s. Almost from the very beginning, the CCCS in general and Stuart Hall in particular struggled to reconcile a commitment to the politics of 1968 with the politics of hierarchy and leadership. The attacks from without were ultimately of far greater significance to the Centre's history as an actual institution. Yet the deep-rooted problems over leadership, theory and politics meant the working practices that have become such a celebrated part of CCCS folklore would eventually run their course. Cast in this light, the issue is not so much that the CCCS would reflect the supposed fragmentation of New Left politics, but how impressive it was that the Centre was able to persist for so long as a working unit.

⁸⁹Interview with Johnson.

⁹⁰E. P. Thompson, letter to R. Johnson (c. May 1978). CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1.

⁹¹E. P. Thompson, letter to R. Johnson (24 April 1978). CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1.

⁹²E. P. Thompson, letter to R. Johnson (9 January 1980). CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1; E. P. Thompson, in M. Kettle, 'The Experience of

History' in *New Society* (December 1979), 543. CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1. See also E. P. Thompson, cited in Dworkin, *op. cit.*, 238–9.

⁹³R. Samuel, 'Editorial note' in Samuel, *People's History*, *op. cit.*, 376; M. Kettle, *New Society* (December 1979), 543.

⁹⁴Dworkin, *op. cit.*, 245.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL STUDIES

There is a temptation to follow Dworkin in locating the late 1970s as the key turning-point in the viability of the Centre project, as well as the fortunes of the British Left more generally. The events at Ruskin were traumatic for all those involved. In the days afterwards Stephen Yeo, who chaired the debate between Thompson, Johnson and Hall, wrote to Johnson to tell him of his 'bewilderment and sadness' at the turn events had taken.⁹⁵ Bill Schwarz – who had joined the Centre in the mid-1970s and, like Johnson, had invested considerable energy in the project to reconcile social history with cultural studies – was also present at Ruskin and remembers it making him feel 'ill'.⁹⁶ Away from Ruskin, similar feelings were expressed by delegates at what was to be the final Women's Liberation National Conference, held in Birmingham in 1978, which was marked by near-sectarian disputes between socialist and revolutionary feminists.⁹⁷ The late 1970s was also the period during which, according to various commentators, severe divisions were felt within black politics over the increasing centrality of ethnicity.⁹⁸ And May 1979 was, of course, when the 'crisis in hegemony' that Hall and others at the CCCS identified in *Policing the Crisis* was followed by the election of Margaret Thatcher and the ascent of what Hall would presciently term 'Thatcherism'.⁹⁹ Within six months of Thatcher's victory, Hall had left the CCCS for the Open University, much to the evident anguish of those he left behind.¹⁰⁰

Yet to over-emphasize the impact on the CCCS of what was undoubtedly a critical period of upheaval in Britain is to stray too close to the more nostalgic accounts of the CCCS that presuppose the existence of a 'golden age' rooted around a shared commitment to the politics of 1968. In the first instance, efforts at fostering radical political unity continued into the 1980s, not least with the 1984–5 miners' strike, the 'new times' agenda associated with *Marxism Today* and the *Beyond the Fragments* movement organized by Sheila Rowbotham and other feminists in the early 1980s.¹⁰¹ But more than that, while the 1979 History Workshop marked a 'spectacular' moment of rupture, a series of earlier internal debates illustrate the presence of divisions – and diversity – within the CCCS project almost from the moment Hall assumed the position of acting director in 1969. The debates were initiated by Hall and were conducted in the form of long position papers that were pre-circulated to all CCCS members and discussed at general meetings. These began as relatively congenial conversations about the nature of the CCCS project and are in some ways further evidence of the extent to which there was, after 1968, a concerted attempt to initiate a form of democratization within the Centre.¹⁰² Concerned about the dangers of overly idealistic conceptions, for example,

⁹⁵S. Yeo, letter to R. Johnson (8 December 1979). CRL, RJ, USS119/6/1.

⁹⁶B. Schwarz, interviewed by KC, 1 October 2013.

⁹⁷J. Rees, 'A look back in anger: the Women's Liberation Movement in 1978', *Women's History Review*, 19, 3 (2010), 346.

⁹⁸See, for example, A. Sivanandan, *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance* (London, 1982).

⁹⁹S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London, 1983).

¹⁰⁰See CCCS, *Annual Report 1980–81* (January 1981).

¹⁰¹S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London, 1989). See also S. Rowbotham, L. Segal and H. Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism* (London, 1979).

Hall set out the financial and other restrictions on the CCCS, including the limitations on his own time, which he illustrated by providing an overview of his working week.¹⁰³ Other papers from this period offered definitions of what was seen to be the ‘universe of discourse of cultural studies’ or provided fledgling histories of the development of the CCCS and its relationship with the established academic disciplines.¹⁰⁴

Even in these early discussions, however, there is evidence of significant differences in opinion and approach. Brian Trench, for example, who enrolled at the Centre in 1969 and would go on to have a prominent career in journalism, wrote of the ‘psycho-dramas of supposed seminars’ at which ‘theoretical differences’ were manifest in ‘personal animosities’ and ‘emotional inadequacies’.¹⁰⁵ Another student reflected on how an attempt to give each member the space to ‘state our own, very personal, political positions’ during a seminar ended in failure because of the lack of any ‘political consensus’.¹⁰⁶ And signs of the identity politics that are seen to have ‘broken in’ to the Centre years later were also present in these early debates, albeit in relatively tentative forms. Rachel Powell, for instance, had been a contemporary of Hall in the New Left and was a prolific contributor to Centre discussions.¹⁰⁷ In 1970, she attempted to summarize the divergent views of the Centre and situate them against her own politics and perspective as a woman. Given the experimentalism of the CCCS, Powell saw all those with a stake in it as ‘bastards ... cut off from the social and academic definitions of what ... we ought to be’.¹⁰⁸ Yet ‘intellectual women’, Powell argued, ‘are more bastards than the rest of you’.¹⁰⁹ For Judith Scott, who enrolled at the Centre in 1969, it was the men who ‘set the agenda’ at the Centre and women were ‘only just beginning to question that’.¹¹⁰ In response to these interventions, Hall proposed a session on the women’s movement to be delivered by Michael Green ‘and one of the girls’.¹¹¹ In the event, Ros Brunt remembered giving the presentation alongside Scott, both of whom were active in Women’s Liberation. However, in preparation for the talk the two ‘discovered [that] we didn’t agree; Judith was more into letting men off the hook than I was. There was a bit of a conflict’.¹¹² When the presentation was given, Brunt remembered being ‘absolutely slaughtered’ over the issue of the relative primacy of gender as opposed to class, particularly by Chas Critcher who had, he later admitted, a ‘chip on my shoulder’ over the issue.¹¹³

By 1971 these disagreements had escalated to what would ultimately prove to be unsustainable levels. The documents in the archive provide a detailed account of the internal Centre discussions that took place and which have not always been

¹⁰²S. Hall, ‘The reality principle’, *op. cit.*, 1 and 3.

¹⁰³*ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁴See B. Trench, untitled internal document (14 August 1970) and A. Shuttleworth, ‘What we mean by contemporary cultural studies’ (24 September 1970). CRL, SL, USS98.

¹⁰⁵Trench, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹⁰⁶J. Scott, ‘Vague notions: the political orientation of the Centre’ (23 September 1970), 1. CRL, SL, USS98.

¹⁰⁷Hall described Powell as ‘extremely active in and around the Centre’. Email correspondence

between Connell and Hall (1 November 2011).

¹⁰⁸R. Powell, ‘Systems and subjectivity, or whatever turns you on’ (Summer 1970), 7. CRL, P. Willis papers, USS91/2/1.

¹⁰⁹*ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁰J. Scott, interviewed by KC, 26 November 2013.

¹¹¹S. Hall, ‘The political dimension’ (16 October 1970), 3. CRL, SL, USS98.

¹¹²Brunt interview.

¹¹³*ibid.*; Critcher interview.

acknowledged to have existed. The tone was set by Hall who, in March, lamented what he saw as the 'failure of an intellectual collectivity to emerge' within the Centre.¹¹⁴ The context for this was the failure of collective projects such as that on 'the western', the efforts to develop the Centre's journal *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* following the publication of issue one in April, and the ongoing and ultimately unsuccessful struggles to produce a *Reader in Cultural Studies*. Hall felt that work towards these projects was not being shared equally and lacked even the 'goodwill of the whole Centre' towards them.¹¹⁵ More generally, the work that was being produced was 'not of a consistently high critical and intellectual standard'. In spite of the involvement of CCCS members in various political activities outside the Centre, this had not translated to even a 'minimum level of political engagement' within it.¹¹⁶ Centre members had, Hall argued, shied away from what he saw as the necessity of a 'conscious effort of an almost heroic kind' to transform critical practice within a university setting, in favour of an apparently 'unbreakable decision, at all costs, to be nice to each other'.¹¹⁷ If 'that is humanism', Hall concluded, paraphrasing Marx, 'then I am not a humanist'.¹¹⁸

Whether intentionally or otherwise, Hall's words provoked a wave of angry papers about the feasibility of collective work within the Centre, the nature of its politics and how the situation should best be resolved. Richard Dyer, who was researching a thesis on 'The Social Values of Show Business', bemoaned what he saw as the 'laziness ... indolence or self-indulgence' of some CCCS students and suggested that, in future, in order to foster greater shared responsibility, only those with full research scholarships should be admitted to study.¹¹⁹ Others were quick to denounce Dyer's suggestions as 'vulgar condescension masquerading as squirming obsequiousness', an attempted 'suppression of the revolt of the slaves' and a 'reactive' example of an academic careerism that was divorced from wider society.¹²⁰

To some extent these arguments were the product of splits between those who wanted to maintain a 'tight' collective within the Centre and those who were minded to embrace what was seen as its essential 'diversity'.¹²¹ But such positions had become inseparable from individual members' preconceptions regarding the ideal political nature of the Centre, something perhaps best illustrated by Hall. Intervening again in the debate in summer 1971, Hall argued it was the Centre's 'political unsophistication' that was the central problem.¹²² Members had failed to develop a critical 'solidarity' as opposed to a lazy niceness. They had failed to see the potential of developing a 'utopian enclave' within a conservative institution. And they had been unable to see the political possibilities of the CCCS in the aftermath of the New Left and 1968. 'I have a strong sense of our having, collectively, missed a "moment"', he wrote. 'Such moments do not often recur.'¹²³ By September 1972 Hall had apparently

¹¹⁴Stuart Hall, 'Think small – but hard' (March 1971), 3. R. Hoggart papers, University of Sheffield, MS 247/4/6/15.

¹¹⁵*ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁶*ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁷*ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁸*ibid.*

¹¹⁹R. Dyer, 'Some nasty remarks and some constructive ones' (23 March 1971), 2. CRL, SL, USS98.

¹²⁰A. Pringle, 'Against Richard's "remarks"' (24 March 1971), 1. CRL, SL, USS98. B. Willis, 'Liberate the Centre' (27 March 1971), 1. CRL, SL, USS98.

¹²¹Pringle, *op. cit.*, 2.

¹²²Hall, 'The missed moment', *op. cit.*, 15.

given up all hope of a 'tight' political and intellectual collective within the CCCS. Although the Centre may from the outside appear as a 'homogenous group' the fact was, Hall argued, 'we remain ... very diverse: intellectually and temperamentally'.¹²⁴ In contrast to E. P. Thompson's advice to the student movement to spend 'a spell in a Leninist organization' or the army, Hall proposed that the CCCS abandon any hope of a 'grander, more ideal project' that would ultimately prove to be unrealistic.¹²⁵ 'We should try to live with a degree of pluralism,' Hall wrote, 'though far short of the ideal, [it] would at least allow some work to be done'.¹²⁶

The 1971 debates were described by Hall as 'fatally damaging' and a 'near disaster'.¹²⁷ Dyer remembered there being 'a great deal of tension' during this period and recalled the atmosphere in meetings as 'horrible'.¹²⁸ By autumn 1972, Hall's despondency with the situation was such that he raised the prospect of him 'break[ing] the umbilical cord' with the Centre and looking elsewhere for 'the best place to make my own contribution'.¹²⁹ The compromise reached was ultimately the satellite 'sub-group' model of research with a nod towards some limited form of collectivity at General Theory Seminars and later the M.A. course. This was not quite in keeping with the hopes for the CCCS that Hall had initially harboured, though it certainly helped to facilitate the most productive period in the Centre's history. Yet the kind of tensions and schisms that characterized the period 1970–1 were never far away. They re-emerged, for instance, in September 1972 during attempts to plan the priorities for the academic year ahead, and again in 1974 over the issue of what the Centre's taught M.A. should look like.¹³⁰ Furthermore, these divisions had become intertwined not only with the political preconceptions of both new and old members but also the various positions members adopted in relation to particular strands of Marxist theory. The 'spectacular' rupture over the issue of theory that was signalled at Ruskin in 1979 had in fact been rehearsed on numerous occasions within the CCCS during the preceding years.

The position of history was a recurring tension within the Centre. Johnson had been appointed to the CCCS on the understanding that he would 'greatly strengthen the historical side of our work' and implement the establishment of the Centre's M.A. programme.¹³¹ But as he later admitted, he initially struggled to adapt to the differences between the intellectual atmosphere he encountered at the CCCS compared to that which he had been used to in history. Johnson remembered teaching the M.A. 'like a historian would teach it' and encountering resistance from students on the course, many of whom Johnson regarded as being 'way ahead of me' intellectually.¹³² Gregor

¹²³*ibid.*, 16.

¹²⁴S. Hall, 'Some seasonable and unseasonable reflections' (September 1972), 3. CRL, SL, USS98.

¹²⁵*ibid.*, 2. See also E. P. Thompson (ed.), *Warwick University Ltd: Industry, Management and the Universities* (Harmondsworth, 1970).

¹²⁶Hall, 'Some seasonable and unseasonable reflections', *op. cit.*, 2.

¹²⁷*ibid.*

¹²⁸R. Dyer, interviewed by KC, 12 August 2013.

¹²⁹Hall, 'Some seasonable and unseasonable reflections', *op. cit.*, 5.

¹³⁰See, for example, A. Tolson, 'More notes for the M.A. theory course discussion' (12 June 1972). CRL, SL, USS98.

¹³¹S. Hall, Director's Report to the Faculty of Arts, Board of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (14 June 1974), 2. CRL, Colin Sparks papers, US122/1.

¹³²Johnson interview.

McLennan was among the first cohort of students to begin the M.A. in cultural studies and remembered deciding the course 'wasn't theoretical enough', was overly empiricist and as a result, along with other students, 'rebelled against the curriculum' after just three sessions.¹³³ Subsequently, following its establishment by Johnson, McLennan and others, the history sub-group was forced to defend its idea for a journal devoted to history against hostility from others in the Centre. The sub-group acknowledged the presence of 'long-standing and deep-seated confusion about history-in-the-Centre' and a tendency for history to be simplistically conflated with 'concrete studies'. The authors stressed their view of theory as a 'necessary concomitant' to history and argued that any suggestion otherwise was to 'render our project, all of a sudden, marginal to a view of overall Centre purposes' and to 'Centre history' more generally'.¹³⁴ Johnson, then, who was to be attacked by Thompson for his 'theoretical terrorism' in 1979, spent the years leading up to Ruskin defending his ideas from charges of empiricism emanating from within the Centre.

Johnson was endeavouring to introduce greater historical depth to the Centre's work just as there was a concerted attempt by others to move away from what was characterized as the 'humanism' or 'empiricism' of early CCCS work and towards a fuller engagement with the post-structuralist theory of Derrida, Lacan and others. Two critical figures in this respect were Ros Coward and John Ellis. The two had joined the Centre in the mid-1970s with an interest in semiotics and film but soon became frustrated at what they saw as the Centre's inability to conceive of ideology and representation as something that could function independently from class structures.¹³⁵ Ellis saw many in the Centre as wanting to 'cling on to some kind of notion of economic determinism' in their work and seeking 'refuge' from theory by being 'intensively empirical'.¹³⁶ In spite of the collapse of the 'tight' collective in 1971, Ellis emphasized the 'terrorism' of the 'illusory ideal of the collective' at the CCCS which masked the reality of divergent views and at the same time stopped dissenting voices from being heard.¹³⁷ Both Coward and Ellis left the CCCS 'as a result of feeling marginalized' and in 1977 Coward published a paper for the film journal *Screen* that used the Centre's work on sub-cultures and the media as case studies through which to form a critique of the CCCS approach more generally.¹³⁸ Ironically, given what was to come at Ruskin two years later, Coward argued that in spite of its theoretical pretences the Centre remained stubbornly in the tradition of 'British socialist history'.¹³⁹ It reduced what were in fact complex processes of ideological 'transformation' to an 'elementary' and ultimately 'untenable' analysis that hinged on the division 'between capital and labour'.¹⁴⁰ In words that echoed earlier denunciations of Hoggart's understanding of cultural studies from within the Centre, Coward dismissed the CCCS approach as another strand of 'liberal humanist cultural analysis'.¹⁴¹

¹³³G. McLennan, interviewed by KC, 17 July 2013.

¹³⁴History Group, 'Defence of a journal on historiography', internal CCCS document (c. 1977), 1. CRL, RJ, US119/1/1.

¹³⁵Dworkin, *op. cit.*, 147.

¹³⁶J. Ellis, interviewed by KC, 21 November 2013.

¹³⁷J. Ellis, 'General consensus or general seminar?', internal CCCS document (1974), 2. CRL, RJ, US119/1/1.

¹³⁸Ellis interview. See R. Coward, 'Class, culture and the social formation', *Screen*, 18, 1 (1977), 75–105.

¹³⁹*ibid.*, 82.

¹⁴⁰*ibid.*, 76 and 82.

CCCS members including Hall, Tony Jefferson and John Clarke defended their position in the following edition of *Screen*.¹⁴² But the disagreement was about more than the applicability of a particular theoretical tradition. It had become inseparable from personal relations and the politics of gender and class. An emerging theme within Coward's paper, for instance, was that the CCCS position consigned the significance of gender to 'secondary positions' and was reliant on 'an authority invested in certain patriarchal figures'.¹⁴³ Yet it was class, as much as gender, that was the critical influence in these debates, even if this was more implicit than the concurrent tensions within the CCCS over the issue of feminism. Ellis, for example, perceived the sub-cultures sub-group as having a dominant presence within the Centre at this time, and argued that this was a 'real group of working-class men' who revelled in 'being blokes, going to the pub and that kind of thing'. For Ellis, this group were 'macho', 'set the tone' in the Centre and were 'hard for other people to deal with'.¹⁴⁴ Conversely, the CCCS members who were the object of Coward and Ellis's ostensibly theoretical critiques interpreted them as an attack on what they regarded as their own working-class identities. Jefferson noted 'a clear, marked class difference' between the members of the sub-cultures group and Ellis and Coward, while Clarke thought the two perceived the sub-cultures group as 'tedious, sad old working-class boys [who] were lumbering around with Gramsci'.¹⁴⁵ Paul Willis saw the post-structuralists as 'sophisticated, demure bourgeois types' compared to the 'people who often did the fieldwork'. Willis recalled Coward approaching him with the critique that '“the problem with your notion of subjectivity, Paul, is it's so banal”'. This left Willis, he recalled, feeling 'completely fucking destroyed'.¹⁴⁶

It was proving difficult, then, for CCCS members to follow Hall's earlier call for people to learn to 'live with' the Centre's plurality.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, one under-acknowledged issue was the extent to which each new cohort of students was unaware of the battles that had previously been fought over the nature of work at the Centre. Willis, who was closely involved in the CCCS for more than a decade, characterized his time there as a series of 'revolutions', beginning with a brief 'humanist moment' that was subsequently 'overtaken first by Marxism and Althusser, then by post-structuralism, then by feminism, then by anti-racism. Every two years or so was the new wave sweeping in and each had its own ... sectarian politics. The whole period', Willis remembered, 'was changing at a vast rate of knots'.¹⁴⁸

The one constant within the CCCS at this time was Hall. Hall's role in the development of British cultural studies is both widely documented and difficult to overstate.¹⁴⁹ Whether intellectually or politically, in the form of internal position papers,

¹⁴¹*ibid.*, 85–6.

¹⁴²J. Chambers, J. Clarke, I. Connell, L. Curti, S. Hall and T. Jefferson, 'Marxism and culture', *Screen*, 18, 4 (1977), 109–19.

¹⁴³R. Coward, 'Response', *Screen*, 18, 4 (1977), 120–2.

¹⁴⁴Ellis interview.

¹⁴⁵Tony Jefferson, interviewed by KC, 20 August 2013; Clarke interview.

¹⁴⁶Willis interview.

¹⁴⁷Stuart Hall, 'Some seasonable and unseasonable reflections', *op. cit.*, 2.

¹⁴⁸Willis interview.

¹⁴⁹See, for example, S. Hall (with Paddy Whannel), *The Popular Arts* (London, 1964); S. Hall, 'The social eye of the *Picture Post*', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 2 (1972), 71–120; S. Hall, 'Marx's notes on method: a "reading" of the "1857 Introduction"', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*, 6 (1974), 132–71; S. Hall 'Encoding and decoding in the

collaborations with students or more formal pedagogic practice, Hall's influence over Centre life was pervasive, something that is made apparent throughout the scores of interviews conducted with staff and students who were connected to the CCCS at various points from the mid-1960s onwards. Hall is described variously as 'the inspirer', 'the ultimate', 'one of the cleverest people I've ever met anywhere in any context', the person who 'knew more than anyone else in the room', the 'teacher', 'mensch' and 'leader'.¹⁵⁰ For all the respect that former students and collaborators evidently still feel for Hall – something made even more apparent in the aftermath of his death in February 2014 – his elevated position within the Centre also placed particular pressures on the viability of the project as a whole. There was a contradiction between his political belief in collective ways of working and the authority he found he had within the Centre – the formal authority that came with being director, but also that which came from his undoubted charisma and formidable intellect. In spite of his desire to relinquish his academic authority, Hall remained the intellectual inspiration, political ally and uncomfortable father figure of the CCCS.

These contradictions were undoubtedly a critical factor in Hall's eventual decision to leave the Centre. And he was evidently aware of them from a very early period. Hall's disillusionment during the 1970–1 debates, for example, stemmed at least in part from his discomfort in the position as leader. Hall described the Centre as attempting to 'live ourselves out of the master/subordinates role' without having 'transcended them'. He found he had 'neither the "cover" of formal status and authority' nor 'alternative sources of support and criticism'.¹⁵¹ On the one hand, Hall was resented for his authority even as he tried to renounce it. He found it 'impossible' to 'unlearn' not only his prescribed role of teacher and supervisor, but also 'all sorts of unconsciously dominative ways of talking, acting, feeling'.¹⁵² Whether he spoke or remained silent, Hall found that he was confronted with both 'deference and hostility'.¹⁵³ Christopher Pawling, for instance, a student at the CCCS in the early 1970s, remembers that Hall would often sit silently in seminars because he was singled out as 'the representative of paternalism'. People would ask questions and Hall would '[sit] there ... just underlining his books'.¹⁵⁴ Yet on the other hand, there was always the sense that this was Hall's project. As he put it in 1971, 'on subjects of mutual intellectual concern ... I wanted to speak as well and as powerfully as I could'.¹⁵⁵ Hall summarized this as a 'classic "double-bind" '. It was a situation that he found to be a 'wretched and humiliating experience'.¹⁵⁶

It was perhaps inevitable that, just as it had during the debates about Centre collectivism and the role of post-structuralist theory, the contradictions of Hall's authority at the CCCS

television discourse', CCCS stenciled paper no. 7 (Birmingham, 1973).' *Broadcasters and the Audience* (1974); S. Hall (with Tony Jefferson) (eds), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Postwar Britain* (London, 1976); S. Hall, 'The great moving right show', *Marxism Today* (January 1979), 14–20; S. Hall (with Martin Jacques) (eds), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London, 1983).

¹⁵⁰Interviews with Johnson, McCabe, Ellis, Critcher and R. Peters (now known as Mahasiddhi), interviewed by KC, 8 July 2013.

¹⁵¹Stuart Hall, 'The missed moment', *op. cit.*, 12.

¹⁵²*ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵³*ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵⁴C. Pawling, interviewed by KC with R. Brunt and T. Millum, 15 August 2013.

¹⁵⁵S. Hall, 'The missed moment', *op. cit.*, 14.

¹⁵⁶*ibid.*, 15.

were also lived out in the realm of personal relations. As has been explored in a different context, relations in the workplace are often influenced by unconscious desires, resentments and preconceptions of masculinity and femininity.¹⁵⁷ Given the political intensity of what was being attempted at the CCCS, it would be surprising if similar themes did not play a role in the Centre. Hall's influence during the 1980s and 1990s on attempts by a generation of black British artists to articulate the complexities of their own identities has been explored elsewhere.¹⁵⁸ During the 1970s at the CCCS, alongside his intellectual prowess, Hall's personality, age, looks and ethnicity meant he was the focus of considerable attention. One interviewee, for example, described his first impression of Hall as the 'cool dude at the back of the room in a denim top and denim jeans, black guy, the only black guy in the room'.¹⁵⁹ There was, Critcher argued, 'an awful lot of Stuart as daddy going on'. Hall was 'handsome, personable, he was the figurehead . . . there was an enormous amount of emotional energy'.¹⁶⁰ People were 'jockeying for affection with Stuart'.¹⁶¹ Yet there was also ambivalence. Reflecting on the impact of feminism within the Centre, for instance, Charlotte Brunsdon suggests that the relationship between Hall and the Women's Studies Group may have had much to do with 'fantasies and fathers'.¹⁶² And such dynamics were highlighted as early as 1970 by Rachel Powell, who as a contemporary of Hall's perhaps felt better able to articulate the discomfort she felt with this issue. Powell presented Hall as the 'Daddy', both of the Centre and of the wider cultural studies project. Powell was 'exasperated with Stuart', she wrote. She disagreed with the 'Freudian argument that civilization and culture are the result of being exasperated with Daddy', and argued that criticism of Hall was a critical part of the CCCS project. 'Daddies', she argued, 'were invented to be exasperated with, and to be rebelled against'.¹⁶³

It goes against the collaborative spirit of the Centre to invoke the dominating role of just one person. But Hall's presence in both the archive and the personal recollections is exceptional. It points to one of the central contradictions of the CCCS. The extent to which Hall was prepared to embrace the post-1968 ethos of politicized collectivism at the Centre has arguably been under-acknowledged, yet his individual influence on the work produced there is difficult to overstate. Hall's generosity was remarkable and went beyond openness with his intellectual ideas. As he himself put it, among his collaborators he was their 'director, their supervisor, their friend, their political ally [and] their intellectual interlocutor'.¹⁶⁴ By 1979, the task of sustaining each of these roles simultaneously had become 'too much' for Hall.¹⁶⁵ But like each contradiction highlighted in this article, the contradiction of Hall's position was a feature of the CCCS from a very early period, something illustrated by the consideration he gave to leaving Birmingham in 1972. In the aftermath of the early debates about the nature and direction of the CCCS that ultimately led to the abandonment of the 'tight' collective, the Centre adopted a 'looser' way of working that contributed to an extraordinarily productive

¹⁵⁷See M. Roper, *Masculinity and the British Organization Man since 1945* (Oxford, 1994).

¹⁵⁸See K. Mercer, 'Busy in the ruins of wretched phantasia' in Institute of Contemporary Arts, *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire* (London, 1995), 15–22.

¹⁵⁹Interview with Jefferson.

¹⁶⁰Interview with Critcher.

¹⁶¹M. Moos, interviewed by KC, 7 May 2013.

¹⁶²C. Brunsdon, 'A thief in the night', *op. cit.*, 280.

¹⁶³Powell, 'Systems and subjectivity', *op. cit.*, 9.

¹⁶⁴Interview with Hall.

¹⁶⁵Interview with Hall.

period. Yet there was never a unified approach to the project of contemporary cultural studies. The distinction between being committed to a heterogeneous initiative and being committed to a specific approach ultimately had to be acknowledged through the sub-groups, though for a brief 'moment' after 1968 Hall was hoping for something else. The failure to maintain a 'tight' collective was an issue that would be separate from the Centre's eventual fate. The attacks from without were of much greater significance. But it is nevertheless clear that the Centre was from the beginning (or at least its post-1968 'rebirth') always marked by diversity and difference.

CONCLUSION

It is unlikely that the stories surrounding the Centre will lose their appeal any time soon. Indeed, there is something of a publishing industry around the Centre that can sometimes appear untouched by the usual conventions of either the arts or the social sciences. In the selection of interviews with former CCCS staff and students published in *Cultural Studies* in 2013 the most remarkable aspect of all of them is that they were published wholly unabridged. Angela McRobbie, dissatisfied with the way in which the interview was conducted, was even allowed to interview herself.¹⁶⁶ It is rare indeed for any figure in the academy to have their words untouched by an editor, but so great is the reverence paid to the CCCS that thirteen of its figures were accorded the privilege. As if to prove that the words printed belonged more to a fanzine than a scholarly journal, the issue also contained copies of the first seven annual reports of the Centre.

The respect that continues to be conferred upon those who once taught or studied at the Centre may in part be connected to the difficulty those working in the field often have in defining what cultural studies means in the context of its evolution into an established field of enquiry at universities across Europe, the United States and elsewhere. As cultural studies has developed far beyond the specific institutional story told in this article, its practitioners have increasingly returned to their own interpretations of the significance of the CCCS. Cultural studies now offers an established career-path for scholars working across the arts and humanities. But despite this, as Thomas Frank has remarked, many of its leading figures remain welded to the perception of themselves as academic outsiders.¹⁶⁷ The experience of staff and students at the CCCS in Birmingham can easily situate itself in such a manner. The critiques of it from within and without certainly encouraged a siege mentality, especially after Hoggart and then Hall had departed, two individuals who perhaps knew better how to handle their often unsympathetic and frequently ill-informed faculty managers (after all, the highly detailed and intellectually frank accounts found in the annual reports served both an internal and an external purpose).

But it remains crucial not to emphasize only the stories of resistance and ideology. What is evident is a deeply troubled, if highly creative, life at the Centre. Divisions and disputes were normal occurrences. These sometimes bitter experiences were often the fuel for intellectual development, collectively and individually, and were undoubtedly behind

¹⁶⁶A. McRobbie, 'Angela McRobbie interviews herself', *Cultural Studies*, 27, 5 (2013), 828–32.

¹⁶⁷T. Frank, *New Consensus for Old: Cultural Studies from Left to Right* (Chicago, 2002).

the extraordinary – both in terms of quality and of quantity – outputs of the Centre. Such outputs were also the direct product of the distinctive practices described in this article. Seminal interventions such as *Policing the Crisis* and *Women Take Issue* stemmed from the wider political commitments of CCCS students and staff members. Likewise, although the process of collaborative work could be fraught, it helped to produce a body of work that was – in the shape of the *Working Papers* and in later edited collections – simultaneously remarkably heterogeneous and distinctively ‘Birmingham’. Yet the CCCS did not follow a trajectory felt more broadly by the New Left under the challenge of identity politics. Instead, diversity and difference were written into the very structures of the Centre. The sub-groups became the sites of creativity but were also early evidence that cultural studies was never heading towards even a modicum of disciplinary unity.

It is often remarked by CCCS veterans that what was achieved in the decade or so after 1968 could never be achieved in today’s arguably neo-liberal university. Certainly, it would be impossible to get current students involved in new student selection decisions, while the pressures to publish are arguably a disincentive to academic collaboration. But publish is precisely what the CCCS did and they did so in volumes and according to criteria – interdisciplinarity, collaboration, societal impact, widening participation – that today’s academics find themselves increasingly having to respond or at least pay lip service to. Moreover, the CCCS did this for many years with only 2.5 permanent staff, a level of resource far less than many experience today (undergraduate numbers notwithstanding). That the working practices facilitated such achievements is due to what Hall and other cultural studies scholars might refer to as a historical conjuncture. This included the post-1968 moment, the increasing arrival of baby-boomers new to higher education and schooled in varieties of leftist thinking, and the greater space given by university managers for academic practice. This left a legacy of collaborations, practice and spirit that would continue to inspire productive initiatives at the Centre and then the department throughout the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁶⁸ But, at the time, it also required the intellectual openness and sheer charisma of Stuart Hall to whom so many continue to acknowledge their foremost intellectual debt. His own journey in the New Left would continue into the 1980s and beyond, as well as being taken up by former CCCS members. But it was a journey in which cultural studies as an academic practice was not charged with the same hopes and ambitions Hall and others had given it at the end of the 1960s. The formation of the sub-groups in the CCCS was an acknowledgement of the heterogeneous nature of the cultural studies project, a fact which is clear in the archives if not always in the retrospective accounts. The renewal of the New Left – of the kind frequently invoked by Hall – would have to come from ideas and practices elsewhere.^{169,170}

Queen’s University Belfast
University of Birmingham

¹⁶⁸For reflections on the Centre’s work in the 1980s and beyond see, for example, interviews with Johnson and McNeil, as well as A. Gray, interviewed by KC, 16 July 2013, and J. Stacey, interviewed by KC, 30 April 2013.

¹⁶⁹R. Johnson, ‘Optimism of the intellect? Hegemony and hope’, *Soundings*, 54 (2013), 51–65.

¹⁷⁰No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.